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FÉNELON'S

Conversations with M. de Ramsai

THE TRUTH OF RELIGION

WITH HIS LETTERS ON

THE IMMORTALITY OF THE SOUL

AND

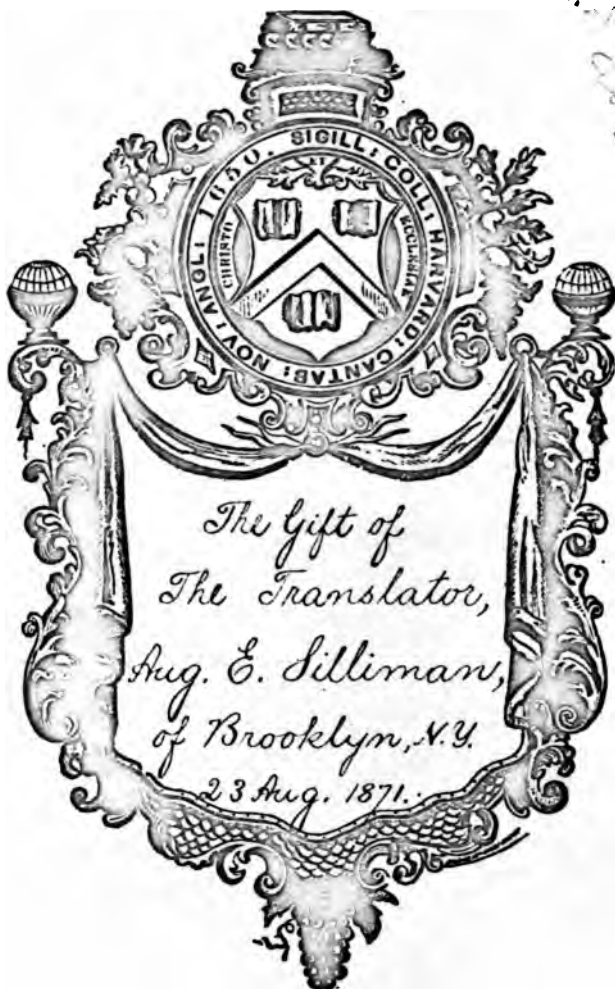
THE FREEDOM OF THE WILL

Translated from the French by
Augustus **A. E. SILLIMAN**

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P R E F A C E.

IN perusing the beautiful edition of FÉNELON, lately published at Paris, edited by M. Aimé Martin, we were struck with the force and spirit of the following "CONVERSATIONS ON THE TRUTH OF RELIGION," from the pen of the Chevalier DE RAMSAY, contained in its Introduction, and thought, as there was apparently no English translation here, that a few leisure hours might be agreeably, perhaps profitably, employed in an endeavor to translate them for the benefit of those who may not have met them in the volumes alluded to, or otherwise. As a sketch of the *dramatis personæ* may add interest to their perusal, we quote the following from literary sources: The Marquis de St. Simon, that caustic and most severe delineator of the principal characters of the reign of Louis XIV., thus speaks of Fénelon: "This prelate was tall, thin, well made, with a large nose, and eyes from which the fire and spirit poured forth as a torrent, and a physiognomy unlike any that I have ever met; a countenance which, once seen, could never be forgotten. It combined within itself everything, yet the opposites did not conflict. It possessed gravity and agreeableness, seriousness and gaiety; and its *tout ensemble* indicated equally the scholar,

the bishop, and the great lord. That which radiated preëminently from it, as well as from all his person, was elegance, spirit, grace, propriety, and, above all, nobility. It required an effort to withdraw your eyes from him. All of his portraits are speaking, without having been able, nevertheless, to catch the exactness of the harmony, that was so striking in the original, and the delicacy of each character, which this so peculiar countenance combined. His manners were responsive to his physical features; there was in them an ease which imparted itself to others, and that peculiar air of elegance and good taste, that can be acquired only in the habitual society of the great; an elegance which shone forth in brilliancy in all his conversation."

Dr. Channing, whose resemblance to Fénelon in dignity, purity, talent and truth, is singularly striking, thus speaks of him: "Fénelon saw far into the human heart, and especially into the lurkings of self-love. He looked with a piercing eye through the disguises of sin. But he knew sin, not as other men do, by bitter experience of its power, so much as by his knowledge and experience of virtue. Deformity was revealed to him by his refined perceptions and intense love of moral beauty. The light which he carried with him into the dark corners of the human heart, and by which he laid open its most hidden guilt, was that of celestial goodness. Hence, though the severest of censors, he is the most pitying. Not a

tone of asperity escapes him. He looks on human error with an angel's tenderness, with tears which an angel might shed, and thus reconciles and binds us to our race at the very moment of revealing its corruptions. That Fénelon's views of human nature were dark, too dark, we learn from almost every page of his writings; and at this we cannot wonder. He was early thrown into the very court from which Rochefoucauld drew his celebrated 'Maxims,' perhaps the spot, above all others on the face of the earth, distinguished and disgraced by selfishness, hypocrisy and intrigue. When we think of Fénelon in the palace of Louis XIV., it reminds us of a seraph sent on a divine commission into the abodes of the lost; and when we recollect that in that atmosphere he composed his 'Telemachus,' we doubt whether the records of the world furnish stronger evidence of the power of a divine virtue, to turn temptation into glory and strength, and to make even crowned and prosperous vice a means of triumph and exaltation."

Of M. de Ramsai there is this historical record: "Andrew Michael Ramsay, frequently styled the Chevalier Ramsay, was a polite writer, born in Scotland, of an ancient family, A. D. 1668. After receiving a liberal education at St. Andrews, he went to Holland, (and we infer that it was at this time that the 'Conversations' alluded to, took place.) M. de Ramsai, having first been Governor to the Duke de Chateau Thierry and the Prince de Turenne, was created Knight

of St. Lazarus, and afterwards sent for to Rome by the Chevalier de St. George, styled then James III., King of Great Britain, to take charge of the education of his children. He returned to Scotland in the year 1724, and resided some years in the family of the Duke of Argyle, where he occupied himself with literary pursuits—had the title of LL. D conferred on him by Oxford A. D. 1730, returned subsequently to France, and resided with the Prince de Turenne until his death, A. D. 1743. He wrote on various subjects—belles lettres, political economy, religion, biography,” and in the latter published a history of the life and works of Fénelon, from which the following extract purports to have been taken.

The Book of “Maxims.” alluded to in the text, was elicited by the persecutions of the celebrated Madame Guyon, the purity of whose character and doctrines Fénelon felt himself called upon to defend; and he there cited, in her behalf, the authority of the ablest and most revered scholars of the Roman Catholic Church. His enemies, through Mad. de Maintenon, persuaded the arrogant and bigoted Louis XIV. to demand from Rome its condemnation. The demand was complied with under threats, but with manifest reluctance, and after months of delay. “Intrigue and calumny had not sufficed; that nothing should be wanting to the glory of the condemned, there were added supplications, entreaties, and finally the menaces of a king.” While those of us not of the

Roman Catholic Church, look with astonishment at such submission from a mind so exalted, we find the solution of the mystery in the principle laid down in these "Conversations," and cannot but admit the consistency and truthfulness of Fénelon, in surrendering at once, and without a murmur, his individual judgment to the decision of what he believed to, be the Court of Final Appeal, in all questions pertaining to religion.

We have also translated Fénelon's examinations of the questions of the "Immortality of the Soul," and the larger portion of that on "The Freedom of the Will;" questions as deeply interesting now as they were thousands of years ago.

It is hardly necessary to say that these translations have been made in no spirit of sect—assuredly not of any which would interpose the most distant barrier to the boundless freedom of the Soul in its conscientious worship of the Deity—but simply to place before the reader a spirited and intelligent examination of the question of the truth of Revealed Religion by enlightened and educated mind.

André Michel, Chevalier de Ramsay
CONVERSATIONS OF FÉNELON AND M. DE RAMSAI

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THE TRUTH OF RELIGION.

IN the year 1710, I had the honor to see M. DE CAMBRAI (Fénelon) for the first time. I deem it my duty to relate the conversations I had with him on the subject of Religion, because they indicate the character of his spirit, and show, at the same time, that far from conducing to a subtle Deism and an independence of all visible authority, as his adversaries have sometimes insinuated, his piety furnished, on the contrary, the most solid proofs of his Christianity and Catholicism.

Born in a free country, where the human spirit exhibits itself under all its forms without constraint, I had examined the majority of religions to arrive at the truth. The fanaticism, or the contradiction which reigned in the various Protestant systems, disgusted me with all the sects of Christianity.

As my heart was not corrupted by violent passions, my spirit could not approve of the absurdities of Atheism. To believe that nothing was the source of all that is—the finite Eternal, or the Infinite an assemblage of all limited beings—appeared to me extravagancies more unwarrantable than the most senseless dogmas of any sect of believers.

I chose, then, to take refuge in a sage Deism, which confined itself to a respect for the Divinity, and to the immutable ideas of pure virtue, without caring either for exterior worship, the priesthood, or the mysteries. I could not, nevertheless, shake off my respect for the Christian religion, the morality of which is so sublime. A thousand doubts presented themselves to overwhelm my spirit. To precipitate myself headlong into Deism appeared to me a bold step; to take refuge in any sect of Christianity, a puerile feebleness. I wandered here and there in the vague principles of an extreme toleration, without being able to find a fixed point. It was in this disposition that I arrived at Cambrai.

M. the ARCHBISHOP, received me with that paternal and affectionate kindness which gains the heart at once. I entered with him, during the space of six months, into a very extended examination of religion. I cannot recount here all that he said to me upon this subject. I simply relate the substance. This is nearly the way in which, in conversation, I explained to him my principles.

God requires no other worship than the love of his infinite perfection, from whence flow all the virtues, human and divine, moral and civil. All the philosophers, all the wise men, all the nations have had some ideas of this natural Religion; but they have mingled it with dogmas more or less true, and have expressed it by a worship more or less proper. All forms of Religion are agreeable to the Supreme Being, where the ceremonies, opinions, and even errors themselves of a sect, are made use of to lead us to adoration of the Divinity. An external worship is necessary; but the different forms of this worship are, as the different forms of civil government, more or less good, according to the use that is made of them. I cannot admit that true religion should be confined to any particular society. I admire the morality of the Gospel; but all speculative opinions are matters of indifference, of which the Sovereign Wisdom takes little note.

He answered: "You cannot rest in your philosophic independence, nor in your vague tolerance of all sects, without regarding Christianity as an imposture; for there can be no reasonable medium between Deism and Catholicism."

This idea appeared to me a paradox. I begged him to explain it. He continued: "It is necessary to confine yourself to a natural Religion, founded on the idea of God, renouncing all law, supernatural or revealed; or, if one is admitted, to recognize some supreme authority which speaks at all times as its

interpreter. Without this fixed and visible authority, the Christian Church would be like a Republic, to whom wise laws were given, but without magistrates to enforce them. What a source of confusion! Each one would come, the book of laws in his hands, to dispute their sense. The divine books would serve no other purpose than to nourish our vain curiosity, jealousy of opinion, and haughty presumption. There would be indeed but one text, but as many different manners of interpreting it as heads. The divisions and subdivisions would multiply themselves without end, and without resource. Has not our Sovereign Lawgiver provided better for the peace of his Republic, and the conservation of his law? Besides, if there were not an infallible authority which says to all of us, 'There is the true sense of the Holy Scriptures,' how could the ignorant peasant and simple artisan engage in an examination where the learned themselves cannot accord? God would have failed to the need of nearly all men in giving them a written law, if he had not furnished them, at the same time, with a sure interpreter, to spare them a research of which they are incapable. Every simple and sincere man has but to recognize his own well felt ignorance to perceive the absurdity of all the sects, who ground their separation from the Catholic Church on the offer of making him judge of matters which surpass the natural capacity of his mind. Ought we to believe the new reform, which demands the impos-

sible, or the Ancient Church, which provides for human helplessness?"

"Finally, it is necessary to reject the Bible as a fiction, or to submit to this Church. Consult the sacred books—examine the extent of the promises which Jesus Christ has made to the hierarchy, depository of his law. He says, that all that she shall bind upon the earth shall be bound in Heaven; that he will be with her to the consummation of ages; that the gates of hell shall not prevail against her; that he who listens to her, listens to Him; that he who despises her, despises Him; and, finally, that she is the base and column of Truth. You cannot elude the force of these terms by any commentary; you have no resource other than in rejecting altogether the authority of the Lawgiver and that of his Law."

What! MONSEIGNEUR, said I to him, with impetuosity, would you have me regard any society on the earth as infallible? I have examined the majority of sects. Permit me to say, with all the respect that is due to you, that the priests of all religions are often more corrupt, or more ignorant, than other men. They are all equally suspected by me.

He answered, in a tone gentle and temperate: "If we do not elevate ourselves above that which is human, in the most numerous assemblies of the Church, we shall find naught there but what shocks us, disgusts us, and nourishes our inbred passions, prejudices, human infirmities, policy, factions, and cabals. But the Divine

power is all the more to be admired in that it accomplishes its designs by means which appear of a character to destroy them. It is here that the Holy Spirit shows itself master of the human heart. It causes all that appears defective in particular pastors to serve to the accomplishment of its promises; and by a Providence always attentive, watches the moment of their decision, and renders it still conformable to its will. It is thus that God acts in all, and everywhere. In the powers, civil and ecclesiastical, all obey his laws, and accomplish his designs in a manner, necessary or free. It is not the holiness of our superiors, nor their personal talents, which render our obedience a divine virtue, but the inward submission of the mind to the order of God."

I requested time to weigh the force of this reasoning. I reviewed it in my spirit. I examined it night and day. I came to the conclusion, finally, after long research and reflection, that we could not admit of a revealed law without submitting it to its living interpreter. But this truth made an impression on me entirely different from that which it naturally should have done. My soul enveloped itself in thick clouds. I felt all the attacks of incredulity.

During the time of this extreme agitation, I was violently tempted to leave him. I began to suspect his integrity. There was but one way to surmount my distress; it was to confide it to him. What struggles did I not undergo before I was able to arrive at

this simplicity! It was necessary, nevertheless, to come to it. I asked of him then a private audience. He accorded it to me; I threw myself on my knees before him, and said, "Pardon, MONSIEUR, the excess of my distress. Your sincerity is suspected by me, and I cannot longer listen to you with docility. If the Church is infallible, you have then condemned the doctrine of pure love, in condemning your book of 'Maxims.' If you have not condemned this doctrine, your submission was feigned. I find myself under the cruel necessity of regarding you as an enemy to either charity or truth."

Scarcely had I pronounced these words than I burst into tears. He raised me, embraced me with tenderness, and said: "The Church has not condemned pure love in condemning my book. This doctrine is taught in all the Catholic schools; but the terms I made use of to explain it were not proper for a dogmatical work. My book is of no value; I no longer esteem it. It was the blight of my spirit, and not the fruit of the unction of the heart. I do not wish you to read it."

He here said to me all that I have related heretofore in speaking of this work, and explained the matter thoroughly. [M. de Ramsai alludes here to what he has said in another place, relative to the submission of the Bishop of Cambrai to the judgment which condemned the Book of "Maxims."]

This conversation dissipated my distrust as regarded his person; nevertheless, my doubts on religion in-

creased. I saw that in reasoning philosophically, it behooved me to become either Catholic or Deist; but sage Deism appeared to me an extreme more reasonable than Catholicism. Truth fled from my spirit, while gentle peace abandoned my heart. I fell into a profound melancholy. Some weeks passed thus, without my being able to speak to him. He essayed many times to open my heart, and did it in a manner so affectionate that I could not resist.

Finally, I said to him, in a trembling voice: "Your last conversation has had a strange influence on me. All my reading and research no longer amount to anything. I see now that there is no reasonable medium between Deism and Catholicism. But, rather than believe all that the Catholics ordinarily believe, I choose to cast myself into the other extreme. I intrench myself in that pure Deism, which is equally remote from insipid credulity, and extreme unbelief. My faith, disengaged from the multiplicity of uncertain opinions, subtle and shocking, reduces itself to the religion eternal, universal and immutable of Love. To feel its truth, every man has but need to reënter within himself."

"How few men are there," replied he, "who are capable to reënter thus within themselves, to consult pure reason! Suppose there were some here and there, who could walk in this purely intellectual path; nevertheless, the common mass of men are incapable of it, and have need of exterior aid. The subtle

passions of the mind blind no less than do the grosser passions. The first truths escape sometimes even the most philosophic minds. They find no longer fixed principles to arrest them in the torrent of uncertainty which sweeps them on.

“As in civil society *it is necessary to commit reason to writing*, to reduce its precepts into a body of laws, and to establish magistrates to execute them, because all men are not in a state to consult and follow, by themselves, the natural law; so in religion, men not being willing to listen with attention to, nor to follow by love, the interior path of sovereign wisdom, nothing was more worthy of God than to speak himself to his creatures in a sensible manner, to convince the incredulous, to fix the visionary, to instruct the ignorant, and to unite them all in the belief of the same truths, practice of the same worship, and submission to the same Church. Why do you recoil against a succor so necessary for human feebleness, failing which, nations the most learned and polished, have fallen into the grossest errors in regard to divinity and morality?”

The philosophy of Love, said I, interrupting him, with warmth, is common to all spirits, to all nations, and to all religions. Vestiges of it are found everywhere, even in the bosom of Paganism. Unsophisticated minds have practiced it, better perhaps, than philosophers have spoken of it. Each sect has mingled with it absurd opinions. I find them in the Bible, as

everywhere else. But, **MONSEIGNEUR**, forgive me for speaking to you thus. I fear that I blaspheme that of which I am ignorant.

He remained some time in silence without answering me, and then said: "He who has not felt all the conflict which you undergo to arrive at the truth, knows not its price. Open your heart to me. Do not fear to shock me. I see your wound, it is deep; but it is not without remedy, since you disclose it."

I continued: It appears to me that the legislator of the Jews represents to us the Supreme Being as a tyrant who renders all the human race miserable, because their first father eat a forbidden fruit. They could not have participated before their existence in this slight fault; nevertheless, God has punished them for it, not only by corporeal sufferings and death, but in delivering them over to all the passions, and finally, to eternal pains. According to the common belief, God forgot all the nations of the earth, to occupy himself with a people, gross, rebellious, unjust, and cruel—the dogmas and manners of whom, appear unworthy of the Divinity.

A second lawgiver comes. His morality is more sublime, and his manners more pure. I do not say, with certain rash spirits, that he was an impostor. I believe him an excellent philosopher, who sought to render men good and happy, by teaching them the true worship of the Supreme Being. But the pretended depositaries of his law have drowned it in a

multitude of absurd fictions, of obscure dogmas, of frivolous opinions, which render the Creator less lovely to his creature.

He listened to me to the end with admirable tranquility, and then said: "God has so tempered the light and the shade in his oracles, that this mingling is a source of life for those who search the truth to love him, and an abyss of darkness for those who combat it to flatter their passions. The most of the objections that you raise are false and malicious constructions, which the incredulous give to religion. Listen to me, if you please, an instant, with attention. Here is another plan of the Bible:

"God would be loved *as he merits*, before permitting himself to be seen *as he is*. The luminous light of his essence would determine us invincibly to love him, but he demands to be adored with a love free and of pure choice. It is for this that all free beings pass through a state of proof before being able to attain the supreme blessedness of their nature. The commencement of their existence is a noviciate of love.

"The angels and our first parents having abused their liberty in a paradise of immortality and delight, God changed our state of probation into a mortal state, mingled with good and evil; that the experience of the nothingness and hollowness which are found in the creature should make us desire, without ceasing, a better life. Since that time, we are all born with a

tendency to evil. Our souls are condemned to terrestrial prisons, which obscure our spirits and weigh down our hearts; but, by the grace of the Liberator, this concupiscence is not an invincible force which drags us down; it is but the occasion of combat, and through that a source of merit. To love God in privations and pain is a state more meritorious than that of the angels, who love him amid pleasure and joy. This is the mystery of the Cross, so scandalous to the imagination and self-love of profane men.

“We are born, then, all sick; but the remedy is always present to cure us. The light which instructs every man coming into the world never fails to any. This Sovereign wisdom has spoken differently, according to different times and different places; to some by the supernatural law, and by the miracles of the prophets; to others by the law of nature, and by the wonders of Creation. ‘Each one will be judged by the law that he has known, and not by that which he has not known.. No one will be condemned, except that he has not profited by that which he has known, to merit to know more.’ [St. Aug.]

“Finally, God came himself, under a flesh similar to our own, to expiate sin, and to give us the model of worship which is due to him. God could not pardon the criminal without showing his horror of the crime; it is what he owed to his justice, and it is what Jesus Christ alone could do. He has shown to

men and angels, and all the celestial spirits, the infinite opposition of the Divinity to the destruction of order, since it cost such agony to the man—God.

“Besides, this sacrifice of Jesus Christ, immolated in homage to divine holiness—his profound annihilation before the Supreme Being, his infinite love of order—will be the eternal model of the love, of the adoration, of the homage of all intelligences. It is by this that they will learn what they owe to the Supreme Being, in seeing the worship which he rendered to himself through sainted humanity. The religion of this eternal Pontiff consists alone in charity. The sacraments, the ceremonies, the priesthood, are only salutary aids to solace our feebleness—sensible signs to nourish, in ourselves and in others, the knowledge and the love of our common Father; or, finally, means necessary to retain us in order, union, and obedience.

“Soon these means will cease—the shadows will disappear; the true temple will open; our bodies will arise glorious, and God will communicate eternally with his creatures, not only according to his pure Divinity, but under a human form, to show us all the mysteries of his essence and the wonders of his creation.

“This is the general plan of Providence; this is, so to speak, the philosophy of the Bible. Can there be anything more worthy of God, or more consoling to man than these high and noble ideas? Should we

not wish to believe them true, supposing even that their truth could not be demonstrated?"

I replied: May not Moses and Jesus Christ have formed this beautiful system through a spirit of philosophy, without any divine commission? May they not have supposed an intercourse with the Divinity—not to deceive men, but to give credit to their law, and through that to render us good and happy in teaching us true morality?

He answered: "Moses and Jesus Christ have proved their mission by supernatural acts, which bear the character of an infinite power and wisdom.

"I do not speak of the miracles of Moses, nor of the incorruptible transmission, even down to us, of the books which contain their history. You can see their proofs in the excellent discourse of M. de Meaux sur l'Histoire Universelle. He has shown the chain of tradition from the origin of the world. He has fortified it by reflections which indicate equally the grasp of his mind and the extent of his knowledge.

"Neither do I speak of facts predicted in these ancient books, which demanded, not only a divine wisdom to foretell them, but an infinite power to accomplish them. Such was the conversion of the Gentiles to Christianity—an event which, depending on the free coöperation of men, showed that the God who had revealed it had an incommunicable power over the heart.

"I do not enter," continued he, "into the details of these facts, which indicate visibly that the law of the Jews came from on high. I go straight to Christianity. In demonstrating its truth, that of Judaism is proved, since the lawgiver of the Christians has believed it divine.

"The miracles of Jesus Christ have not been performed in a corner, in impenetrable retreats, nor in deep caverns, but in the face of an inimical, incredulous people — miracles published afterwards, and renewed by the Apostles in many different nations — miracles, which these nations had a powerful interest to denounce as false, had falsity been suspected. Our Lord nourished a multitude of people with two or three loaves. He healed the incurably sick by a simple word. He caused the dead to come out from the tomb. He raised himself. All was of public notoriety, where the least imposture would have been easy of discovery. It was not a question of tricks which fascinate the eye, of feats of activity, or subtle operations of physics, but of palpable facts, visibly contrary to the common laws of nature. The simple and the wise were equally judges of them. They had but to open their eyes to convince themselves of their truth.

"Besides, all bear the character of an infinite goodness and power, which acts without parade, and from whom the miracles appear to escape through compassion to men, to solace their corporeal miseries, or to

heal their spirits. These miracles have been performed solely to establish the true worship of the Divinity. Jesus Christ assures us that he has made them only to lead man back to his own proper heart, to there search the proofs of his doctrine, of which the end and consummation is Charity.

“Finally, the principal ocular witnesses of these miraculous facts cannot be suspected. It is possible that men, through prejudice or obstinacy, might suffer all kinds of evil to sustain speculative errors, because they could persuade themselves, in good faith, that they were truths. But that men, without any view of pleasure or ambition—of recompense, temporal or eternal—should expose themselves to all manner of present evils, and thereafter to the avenging justice of a God, enemy to falsehood, to sustain that they had heard with their ears, and seen with their eyes, things that had never been; such disinterested love of malice and imposture is absolutely incompatible with human nature—above all, in men who passed their lives in practising and teaching the most sublime morality that has ever been.

“Can these three characters of truth be found in the pretended miracles of magicians and impostors, of Apollonius or Mahomet? They could give to men a spectacle of ostentation to surprise them, to amuse them, to render themselves their masters. But have they done things of such public notoriety, seen by similar witnesses, to establish a morality so pure?

“The religion of Moses, considered by itself, and without connection to Christianity, might be suspected of policy. It might be said that the magicians of Egypt, having imitated a part of his prodigies, he did but surpass them in the magic art. But, in the religion of Jesus Christ, there is seen no pretext for incredulity, no shade of policy, no vestige of human interest. The miracles prove the divine mission of the Law-giver; and the purity of his law shows that the miracles were not deceptions. If a legislator wished to deceive men by false prodigies, and to abuse their credulity to render himself their master, would he invent a religion which destroys the entire man, which renders him a stranger to himself, which overturns the idolatry of Self, which obliges us to love God more than ourselves, and to love ourselves only for him? Jesus Christ demands of us this love, not only as a homage to the Divine perfection, but as a means necessary to render us happy.

“Exiled here below during a moment infinitely short, Jesus Christ teaches us to regard this life as the infancy of our being, and as an obscure night, of which all the pleasures are but fleeting dreams, and the evils salutary disgusts, to cause us to tend to our true country. Penetrated with our nothingness, our helplessness, our darkness, he teaches us to open our hearts, without ceasing, before the Being of beings, that he may retrace in us his image; that he may embellish us with his beauty, enlighten us and animate

us; that he may give us well being, as well as being, reason as well as life, our perfect loves as our truer lights; that he may thus produce in us all the virtues, human and divine, till being conformed to himself, he can absorb and consummate us in his Divine unity.

“This is the adoration, in spirit and in truth, which the Scriptures propose, adoration which man finds so conformed to his natural ideas when it is explained to him—adoration, nevertheless, of which there is hardly seen a trace in the most refined Paganism. It was only at a later period, and after Christianity had enlightened the world, that the pagan philosophers—Arabs and Persians—borrowed this language, which they have always spoken imperfectly.

“All sustains itself in Jesus Christ; his manners respond to his morality. This divine lawgiver did not content himself with giving to men dry and naked precepts of a sublime morality. He practised it himself, and placed before our eyes the example of an accomplished virtue, which had nothing, and which pretended to nothing on the earth. All his life was but a tissue of suffering, a perpetual adoration, a profound annihilation before the Supreme Being, an unbounded submission to the divine will, and an infinite love of order. He died finally as if abandoned of God and men, to show that perfect virtue, sustained by the sole love of justice, could remain faithful amid the most terrible sufferings, without any shadow of sensible support, whether celestial or ter-

restrial. Was there ever seen a similar lawgiver, or a similar law? The true Love developed, purified, and perfectly practised, can be found only with the Christian.

“The establishment of such a religion among men is the greatest of all miracles. In spite of the Roman power, in spite of the passions, the interests, the prejudices of so many nations, of so many philosophers, of so many different religions, twelve poor fisherman, without art, without eloquence, without force, spread everywhere their doctrine, and notwithstanding a persecution of three centuries, which appeared ready to extinguish it at any moment; notwithstanding the perpetual martyrdom of an innumerable number of persons of all conditions, of all sexes, of all countries, truth triumphed finally over error, according to the predictions of the old and new law. Where can be shown any other religion which bears these visible marks of a divinity that protected it?

“That a conquerer should establish by force of arms the belief of a religion which flatters the senses; that a wise lawgiver should make himself listened to and respected by the utility of his laws—that a sect, accredited and sustained by the civil law, should abuse the credulity of the people; all that is possible. But what could the victorious, learned and incredulous nations have seen to have induced them to surrender themselves so promptly to Jesus Christ, who promised them nothing in this world but suffering

and persecution—who proposed to their belief mysteries at which the human mind revolts, and the practise of a morality which sacrifices all our most favorite passions; in one word, a faith and a worship which drives both our reason and self-love into despair! ‘Would it not have been a miracle greater ‘and more incredible than those we are not willing to ‘believe, to have converted the world to a similar ‘religion without miracles?’” (St. Aug.)

I replied: Your views, MONSEIGNEUR, impress and penetrate me. Nevertheless, I feel always inclined to regard facts so distant as having been perhaps exaggerated, perverted, or imagined by the priests and by politicians, who make use of Religion to domineer over the people.

“The truth of these facts cannot be doubted,” he answered, “since the books which contained their history have been received and translated by a great number of different peoples as soon as they have appeared. They have been read in the assemblies of nearly all nations from age to age. No one has, nevertheless, accused them of falsity—neither the Jews, nor the Pagans, nor the Heretics, although they had a powerful interest to contradict them, and to unmask the imposture. The Jews said, it is true, that Jesus Christ had performed these miracles by magic, but they did not reject them as suppositious. The Pagans could not deny these facts any more than the Jews. Celsus, Porphyri, Julian the Apostate, Plotinus

and other philosophers, who, from the earliest time, attacked Christianity with all the subtilty imaginable, acknowledged the miracles of Jesus Christ, the holiness of his life, and the authority of the books that contained their history. Finally, the numerous and successive sects which have troubled the Church in each age, prove invincibly that the sacred text could not have been corrupted without the imposture having been discovered. Thus, in going back from age to age to Jesus Christ, the Christians, the Heretics, the Jews, the Pagans, the Greeks, the Romans, the Barbarians—all render testimony of the same facts and the same books. As the certainty of our ideas depends on the universality and immutability of the evidence which accompanies them, in the same manner, the certainty of facts depends upon the universality and the immutability of the tradition which confirms them. Is it possible that the whole of a nation, and thereafter many different nations, should have been made to believe that they had seen with their eyes, and heard with their ears, things which had never been; that the memory of these suppositious facts should have perpetuated itself boldly, successively, universally, in all ages, by different peoples, whose interests, religions and prejudices were opposed to it; that these peoples should conspire with their enemies to spread an illusion which condemned and confounded them; and that, nevertheless, in the actual time of the imposture, nor in the following ages, it should not have been

unmasked? That, I insist, is not only incredible, but absolutely impossible."

I am delighted, said I, to see this union of proofs drawn from miracles and morality, from the interior spirit of the law, and the exterior prodigies of the Lawgiver. The base and mercenary ideas which are commonly entertained of Religion appeared to me unworthy of a divine mission. I suspected the miracles of the Lawgiver, when I knew not the beauty of the law. But, MONSEIGNEUR, wherefore is there found in the Bible a contrast so shocking, of luminous truths and obscure dogmas? I could well wish to separate the sublime ideas of which you speak from what the priests call mysteries.

He answered: "Why reject so many lights that console the heart, because they are mingled with shadows which humiliate the mind? Should not true Religion both elevate and cast down the man—show him, at the same time, his grandeur and his feebleness? You have not yet a sufficiently comprehensive idea of Christianity. It is not only a holy law, which purifies the heart; it is also a mysterious wisdom, which conquers the spirit. It is a continual sacrifice of our entire self in homage to the Supreme reason. In practising its morality, we renounce pleasures for the love of the Supreme beauty. In believing its mysteries, we immolate our ideas out of respect for eternal truth. Without this double sacrifice — of thoughts and passions — the holocaust is

imperfect, our victim is defective. It is by this sacrifice that the entire man disappears and vanishes before the Being of beings.

“The question is, not to examine whether it is necessary that God should thus reveal to us mysteries to humiliate the spirit; it is to know whether he has revealed them or not. If he has spoken to his creature, obedience and love are inseparable—Christianity is a fact. Since you no longer doubt the proofs of this fact, the question is, not to choose what you will or will not believe. All the difficulties of which you have collected examples will vanish when the mind is cured of presumption. Then there will be no difficulty in believing that there is, in the Divine nature and the conduct of its Providence, a profoundness impenetrable to our feeble reason. The Infinite Being ought to be incomprehensible to the creature. On one side is seen the Lawgiver, whose law is entirely divine, who proves his mission by miraculous facts, which cannot be doubted—by reasons as strong as those which we have to believe them; on the other we find mysteries which shock us. What is to be done between these two embarrassing extremes, of a clear Revelation and an incomprehensible obscurity? We find no resource other than in the sacrifice of the mind; and this sacrifice is a part of the worship of the Supreme Being. Has not God infinite knowledge, which we have not? When he reveals a portion of it in a supernatural manner, it does not devolve on us to

examine the *how* of these mysteries, but the *certainty* of their revelation. They appear to us inconsistent, without being so in fact; and this apparent incompatibility arises from the feebleness of our minds, which have not knowledge sufficiently extended, to see the connection of our natural ideas with these supernatural truths.

Christianity adds nothing to your pure Deism other than the sacrifice of the spirit, and orthodoxy simply perfects the sacrifice. To love purely, to believe humbly, there is all the Catholic religion. We have properly but two articles of faith—the *love* of one invisible God, and the obedience to his Church, his living oracle. All other particular truths absorb themselves in these two truths, simple and universal, which are within the comprehension of all minds. Is there anything more worthy of the Divine perfection, or more necessary for human feebleness?"

I replied: It is no longer the incomprehensible dogmas which arrest my faith, but certain opinions which have glided in among the priests and people. In the Jewish church, did they not obscure their law by uncertain traditions? I believe that the church would never teach errors dangerous and damnable; but might she not tolerate certain innocent errors, because they are useful, and even necessary in the present feebleness of human nature—such, for example, as the opinion as to the eternity of punishment? Nothing would be more dangerous than to absolve

men from this salutary restraint. But there is nothing in the natural ideas we have of the Divinity, nor, indeed, in the Holy Scriptures, which prevents us from believing that, sooner or later, all created beings will return to order. That is the explanation which Origen found to justify all the measures of Providence; there is that which responds to the objections of Celsus, of Bayle, of all the unbelievers—ancient and modern—against the Christian system. Leave to me this one idea, and I abandon to you all the rest.

“No, no,” said he; “I will leave you no resource against the sacrifice of the reason. Supposing that the Church could tolerate innocent errors, nevertheless as she would never teach any dangerous error, which could justify revolt and independence, why do you hesitate to submit, and to lose in the incomprehensible Divine, all the vain speculations which would set bounds to your obedience? During the obscure night of this life, it is not permitted to reason on the secrets of the Divine nature, nor upon the impenetrable designs of its Providence. Yet a moment, and all will be unveiled. God will justify his conduct. We shall see that his wisdom, his justice and his goodness are always in accord, and inseparable. It is our pride and our impatience which prevent our being willing to wait this explanation. Instead of making use of the ray of light which remains to us, to find our way out of the darkness, we lose ourselves in a labyrinth

of disputes, of errors, of chimerical systems of particular sects, which trouble not only the present peace of society, but which indispose us for the true life of all intelligences—which have of themselves neither proper spirit nor proper will; because the same universal reason enlightens them, and the same sovereign love animates them. Until now, you have wished to possess the truth. It is necessary henceforth that the truth should possess you, render you captive, and despoil you of all the false riches of the mind. To be a perfect Christian, it is requisite to be dispossessed of all, even of our ideas. Catholicism alone teaches this evangelical poverty. Restrain, then, your imagination; silence your reason; say, without ceasing, to God: Instruct me by the heart, and not by the mind; cause me to love as the saints have loved. By that you will be safe from all fanaticism and incredulity.”

IMMORTALITY OF THE SOUL.

"CAN IT BE DEMONSTRATED THAT THE SOUL OF MAN IS IMMORTAL?"

It will not be difficult to enlighten ourselves upon this question, if, confined within its proper limits, we dismiss from it, all that is extraneous.

It is true, that the Soul of Man is not an immutable essence, possessing, within itself, a necessary existence; for there is but one being who has such existence; who can never lose it; and who can confer it, at his pleasure, on others. God requires no *action* to destroy the soul of man. It needs but for an instant the cessation of that, by which, he at each moment continues its existence, to again plunge it into the abyss of nothingness from which he has drawn it; in the same way that a man has but to relax his grasp of a stone held in his hand, to cause its fall; it descends at once from its proper gravity.

The question which may be reasonably asked, is, not whether the soul can be annihilated, in case such is God's pleasure; for it is manifest that it can, and requires but his will to that effect. It is, whether the soul contains within itself natural causes of destruction,

which terminate its existence after a certain time; and if it can be philosophically demonstrated that it has not within itself, such causes.

When we realize the very evident distinction between the body and the soul, we are amazed at their union, and can conceive that it is by the power of God alone that two natures, so utterly dissimilar, could have been forced to act in concert. Bodies do not think. Souls can neither be diminished, increased, nor defined; nor have they physical properties. Ask of any rational man, whether the thought that is within him is round or square, white or yellow, warm or cold, divisible into six or twelve parts; if the atoms of which is body is composed are wise or foolish; if they know each other; if they are virtuous; if they have friendship one for the other; if the round atoms are more spirited and virtuous than the square; let him elect atoms of such figure as he pleases; tell him to sublimate them to the utmost; and then ask him whether the moment arrives at which, without any previous acquaintance, they commence suddenly to know each other; to recognize all that surrounds them; to say to themselves, I believe this, but not that; I love this object, I hate that. He cannot think your questions serious; or, if he does, he pronounces them puerile; as much so, as if you talked to him of metamorphoses, or fairy tales.

The absurdity then of these interrogatories, indicates perfectly, that there enter none of the properties of the

body, into the idea which we have of the spirit, and none of the properties of the spirit, or thinking being, into that, which we entertain of the body, or physical being. The real distinction, and entire dissimilarity of these two beings, thus established, we ought not to be surprised that their union, which consists only in a species of concert, or mutual response, between the thoughts of the one and the movements of the other, can terminate without the cessation of their existence; on the contrary, we should the rather be astonished, that two beings of a nature so entirely dissimilar, could have remained for any time, in harmony of operation. With what propriety then can it be concluded, that one, of these two, must be annihilated, when its union with the other, so unnatural in itself, ceases?

Let us represent to ourselves, two bodies, which are exactly of the same nature; separate them; we destroy neither the one nor the other: still more, the existence of the one cannot prove the existence of the other; nor the annihilation of the one the destruction of the other. Though we may suppose them alike in every respect, their real distinction suffices to show that they are not necessarily the one to the other, a cause of existence, or destruction; as the one is not the other, it can exist, or be annihilated, independently of that other.

Their distinction, then, proves their mutual freedom. And if we reason thus of two bodies which we divide, and which are entirely of the same nature, with how

much stronger reason should we argue in like manner, of the spirit, and the body, in whose union there is nothing natural, so entirely are they unlike. While, on the one side, the cessation of a union, so accidental as that of these two existences, can be to neither a cause of annihilation, so on the other, the destruction even, of one of them, would not be of necessity, a cause for the annihilation of the other. A being who is not the author of the existence of another, cannot cause its annihilation. It is then clear, that the disunion of the body and the soul, does not necessarily effect the destruction of either, and that the annihilation of the body even, would operate in no way, necessarily, to terminate the existence of the soul.

The union of the body and the soul, consisting in a concert of action only, or mutual response between the thoughts of the one and the movements of the other, it is easy to see what its cessation should effect. This concert, as we have said, is not natural; so dissimilar and independent are these beings, the one of the other. There was, but God alone, who could by his will, purely arbitrary and all-powerful, have subjected them to work together, so diverse are they in their nature and operation. Let the will—purely arbitrary and all-powerful—of God, be withdrawn; this forced concert, so to say, ceases instantly; as a stone drops by its proper weight, when the hand no longer sustains it, each returns to its normal independence of action, as regards the other. It should

thence arise, that, far from being annihilated by this disunion, which simply returns it to its original state, the soul should then be free to act independently of the movements of the body; in the same way that I am free to walk alone, as it pleases me, when I am detached from another man to whom a superior power has enchained me. The end of this connection, then, being disembarassment and liberty, as the union itself was burden and slavery, it follows, that the soul ought to think independently of the movements of the body; in like manner, as it is supposed in the Christian religion, that the angels, who have never been invested with bodies, think in Heaven. Wherefore then should we fear the annihilation of the soul in this disunion, which can but effect its entire liberty of thought?

The body, on its side, is not annihilated. Not the least atom of it perishes. There supervenes in what we call death, merely a derangement of the organs; the most subtle corpuscles are disengaged; the machine dissolves, and falls to pieces; but in whatever place, corruption or hazard scatters the debris, not a particle, ceases to exist. All philosophers are of accord, in supposing, that there has never happened in the Universe, the destruction of the most imperceptible atom. With what propriety, then, can we fear the annihilation of this other very noble and thoughtful existence, which we call the soul? How can we imagine that the body, which cannot destroy itself, should destroy the soul, which is more noble, a

stranger to, and absolutely independent of it! The disunion of these two beings can effect the destruction of neither. It is supposed, without difficulty, that no atom of the body is destroyed, at the moment of this disunion. Wherefore, then, do so many seek with eagerness, pretexts, to believe that the soul, which is incomparably more perfect, is annihilated? It is true that God is always all-powerful to destroy it, if he so wills; but there is no reason to think that he will do it any the more, at the time of its disunion from the body, than in that of its union.

That which we call death, being but a simple derangement of the corpuscles which compose the organs, it cannot be said, that this derangement acts on the soul, as on the body. The soul—a thinking existence—has no physical attributes; it has neither parts, nor figure, nor situation of parts, among themselves; nor movement, nor change of situation; thus no derangement can befall it. This soul, which is the *me*—thinking and willing—is a being, simple in itself, a unit, and indivisible. There have never been in the same one man, two *mes*, nor two halves of the same *me*.

Objects arrive at the soul by various organs, stimulated by different sensations; but all, through their various canals, tend to a common centre, where they re-unite. It is the *me*, which is so entirely a unit; that it is, by it alone, that each individual man possesses a veritable identity, and is not many men. It cannot be said of this *me*, which thinks and wills, that

it has divers parts joined together, like the body, composed of members connected among themselves. The soul has neither figure, nor situation, nor local movement, nor color, nor heat, nor hardness, nor any sensible feature. We see it not, we hear it not, we touch it not; we conceive only that it thinks, and wills, in the same manner, as it is the nature of the body, to be defined, and divided. When we recognize thus, the real distinction between the body and the soul, it is necessary to conclude, without hesitation, that the latter has neither composition, divisibility, nor situation of parts, nor, consequently, arrangement of organs. The body, which has organs, can lose this arrangement of parts, change its figure, and become deranged; but the soul cannot lose a composition, which it has not, and which belongs not to its nature.

It has been urged, that the soul having been created only to be united to the body, it is so limited to this society, that its borrowed existence must cease when the association with the body terminates. But it is speaking wildly, and without proof, thus to assume that the soul has been created with an existence confined solely, to the time, of its society with the body. From whence is this singular thought derived, and with what propriety is it supposed, rather than proved?

The body is, doubtless, less perfect than the soul; since to think, is more perfect, than not to think. We perceive, nevertheless, that the existence of the body is not confined to the duration of its society with the

soul. After death has severed this connection, the body still exists, even to its most minute particles. We see two things only—the one, that the body is separated and disintegrated; this cannot happen to the soul, which is simple, indivisible, and void of arrangement; the other, that the body moves no longer with dependence on the thoughts of the soul. Should we not conclude, then, in the same manner, and with much greater reason, that the soul continues to exist on its side, and, that it then commences to think, independently of the operations of the body? The effect follows the being, as all philosophers agree. These two existences are independent, the one of the other, as much in nature as in operation. As the body has no need of the thoughts of the soul, to be moved, so, the soul, requires not the movements of the body to think. It is by accident, alone, that these existences, so unlike, and so independent, are subjected to act in concert; and the end of their transient union, will again release them, to act freely, each according to its peculiar constitution.

Finally, the question is not, whether God, who is the master to annihilate the soul of man, or to continue its existence without end, has willed the destruction or conservation. There is no reason to think that he will destroy the soul—He, who destroys not the least atom in the Universe; there is no reason to think that he will destroy it at the moment when he separates it from the body, rather than at any other time,

since it is an existence entirely foreign to the body, and independent of it. This disconnection, being but the end of a subjection to a certain concert of action with the body, it is manifest, rather, that it is the deliverance and release of the soul, and not the cause of its destruction.

We must claim, that we have a right to assume that this destruction, so extraordinary, and so difficult to comprehend, supposes, that God, himself, has warned us of it in his word. What depends upon his supreme will, can be revealed to us, only, by himself. Those who wish to believe in the mortality of the soul against all probability, should show that God has so spoken, to assure us of it. It is not for us to prove that God wills not this destruction; it suffices us to suppose, that the soul of man, which is the most perfect of beings which we know, next to God, must doubtless be less likely to lose its existence, than the other baser things which surround it; and as we know that the destruction of the least atom, is without example in the Universe, since the creation, we have the right to believe that the soul of man is, at least as the minutest atom, free from danger of annihilation.

This is the result, the most reasonable, the most evident, the most decisive, at which we can arrive. It devolves on, the advocates of the mortality of the soul, to dispossess us of it, by proofs clear, and positive; and they can prove it only, by the absolute declaration of

God himself. His will, free and supreme, can but be known through himself alone. It is, then, manifest, that those advocating this theory, should demonstrate to us, by some declaration of God himself, that he has made the soul of man an exception, entirely singular to his general law, to destroy no being, and to preserve the least atom. They should show us a declaration of God pointing to this exception.

We produce the Book which bears all the marks of Divinity, since it is through it, that he has taught us to know and love supremely, the true God. It is in this book, that God speaks with such majesty, when he says, "I AM HE THAT IS." No other has represented him, in a manner worthy of him. The gods of Homer, are the opprobrium and derision of divinity.

This volume, after having shown us God as he is, teaches us, the sole worship, worthy of him. It is not to appease him with the blood of victims; but it is, to love him more than ourselves; to love ourselves, only for him, and for his love; to renounce ourselves for him, and to prefer his will to our own; so, that his love shall produce in us all the virtues, and extinguish vice. It demands the entire overthrow of the heart of man—which requisition, man, himself, could never have imagined. Man, surely, could not have invented a religion, which leaves him neither thought nor will—a religion which constitutes him entirely the property

of another. When this religion is proposed to him, even from the most Supreme authority, his mind, at first, cannot comprehend it; his will revolts at it, and all his being is irritated at the demand. It is, indeed, not astonishing, since its fiat is, to confound the entire man; to degrade the me; to dash to pieces this idol; to form a new man; to install God in the place of the me, and to make him, the source and centre of our love. Wherever man has invented a religion, he has framed it very differently; selfishness has dictated it; he has demanded all for himself; and this leaves him nothing. This religion is, nevertheless, so just, that what we the most object to in it, is precisely that, which should the most convince us of its truth. God all, to whom all is due; the creature nothing, to whom nothing should remain, save in God, and for God. All religion, which arrives not at this, is unworthy of God; does not reclaim man, and bears the character of manifest falsehood.

There is upon the earth, but one original book, which teaches that religion consists in loving God more than self, and a renunciation of self for Him; all others which repeat this great truth, have derived it from this one source. The volume which has thus revealed to the world, the Almightyness of God,—the nothingness of man,—with the worship of Love, cannot be other than divine. Either there is no religion, or this is it. Besides, this book, so divine in its doctrines, is full of prophecies, whose accomplishment is obvious to the

whole world; as, for instance, the reprobation of the Jews, and the calling of the idolatrous peoples to the true worship of God by the Messiah. It is authenticated by innumerable miracles performed in broad day, in divers ages, in the face of the greatest enemies of religion. In a word, it has done all that it promised to do; it has changed the face of the world; it has peopled the deserts with solitaires, who have been angels in mortal form; it has caused to flourish, even in the most impious and corrupt nations, virtues the most difficult and lovely. It has persuaded man, idolatrous of self, to count himself as nothing, and to love solely an invisible Being. Such a book should be read as if it were descended from Heaven to earth. It is through it, that God declares to us a truth, already so probable in itself. The same God, all good and all powerful, who could alone deprive us of life eternal, promises it to us. It is by the expectation of this life without end, that he has taught martyrs to despise the short, fragile, and miserable tenure of their bodies. Is it not reasonable that God, who proves, in this short life, each man for vice and virtue, and who often leaves the impious to finish their course in prosperity, while the just live and die amid contempt and adversity—is it not rational, that he should reserve, to another life, the chastisements of the one, and the recompense of the other? This is the warning which this divine book conveys to us—marvellous and consoling conformity between the oracles of Scripture, and the truth

which we bear imprinted within ourselves! All is of accord,—philosophy, the supreme authority of the promises, the intimate sentiment of truth within our hearts.

From whence comes it that men are so reluctant and incredulous, in accepting this happy revelation of their immortality? The impious say, that they are without hope; that in a few days they will be plunged, forever, into the gulf of annihilation; they rejoice at it; they exult in their approaching extinction; they who so madly love themselves, they are fascinated with this doctrine, so full of horror; they seem to gloat over their despair. When we reply to them, that there is a resource in life eternal, they are exasperated against this remedy; it incenses them; they dread to be convinced of it; they turn all their subtilty to cavil against these decisive proofs. Why? Because they prefer to perish, in delivering themselves over to their insensate pride, and brutal passions, rather than to live eternally, constraining themselves to embrace virtue. Oh! monstrous frenzy! Oh! insane self-love, that thus arms man against himself! Oh! man, become his own enemy, through the boundless tyranny of Self!

[Note by Translator.]

Were it not that it may be received figuratively, we should hardly assent to the proposition of Fénelon, that the union of the body and the soul is that of

accident; for of all the physical works of God, which we think we can comprehend, the body bears most strongly the impress of design, in its wonderful, complex, and perfect adaptation of means to ends. In it we recognize machinery of exquisite order, temporarily furnished to the soul, to place it in communion with the other material works of God—that by their study, it may increase in intelligence, and elevate itself in love to Him, who, however incomprehensible to our, as yet, feeble minds, in many of his dispensations, we feel to be the exhaustless fountain of benevolence and Love.

We have learned to define the functions of this body into what we call senses—three: taste, smell, and feeling—intended for its preservation and continuous reconstruction; and two—more noble, sight and hearing—through which, by contemplation of his Creation, we are to approach the Deity. The inferior, though necessary senses, each with appropriate stimulus to achieve its appointed end, and confined within its proper limits, furnish a lower order of pleasure to, and are servants of, the soul; but if this ethereal emanation from the Deity, whose errand here is study of his works, and through them appreciation of his goodness, his love, and elevation to intelligence of higher order still,—if this beautiful Spirit permits itself to be tempted by the pleasure of the inferior senses, and withdraws from the contemplation of the Supreme, then its purity is dimmed; it sinks degraded into that

lower mental stratum, which it participates in, in common with the brutes; and there—its snowy vestments soiled, and struggling in the sensual mire, God still continuously calling it back, through the voice of conscience—it lies, and wails, and sobs despairingly, in what we call **SIN**.

Is it not this continual conflict, which the soul maintains with the lower senses, that constitutes its school of probation here? Alas! how few of us can take a retrospect into our past—realize, indeed, our present—without a shudder, without hanging our heads in humiliation and shame; for, from these lower senses emanate, and can be legitimately traced, not alone the pleasures which man participates in, in common with the swine; but worldly ambition; pride, violence, selfishness, love of gold, and admiration of brick and mortar, called edifices; and silks and shining baubles, and all the other miserable nothings, which they blindly interpose between the soul and its appointed errand.

But let us turn from this sad picture, and, for a moment, to the nobler senses—to vision, and its organ. The Spirit directs its mimic telescope, the eye, on the surrounding world; and instantly, reflected on the retina through the little pupil, it beholds, pictured as if by magic, oceans, mountains, forests, rivers, valleys, tropic vegetation, arctic snows, parents, children, friends—all the machinery of life and being, now stationary, now floating in ever-changing panorama—

panorama, fraught within itself alone, with study for ages—till with the declining sun, darkness insensibly draws its veil around it, and all is lost to view, all animal life is hushed in silence.

But in the darkness, the Spirit still seeks its proper stimulus, the light, and elevates its gaze up to the o'erhanging canopy. Again, the little mirror, faithful to its purpose, performs its duty; now reflects the blazing glories of the starry firmament, the constellations moving on in their appointed journeys in silent majesty; the moon, in serene splendor, sailing amid her sister planets through the cold, blue ether, now struggling with, now joyously passing through the flying clouds, temporarily obscuring her, to cast again her soft and benignant light on all the world beneath, apt portraiture of the soul, in her struggles with the murky clouds of sense.

Amazed, the delighted Spirit begins to reason; it reasons out the lens; places it auxiliary to the little mirror; and straight it finds the distant stars increase in brilliancy—that some are nearer,¹ and that other stars appear, which “which were not there before.” In exultation it enlarges its artificial aid; and now present themselves, far distant in the dark o'erhanging chasms, other, and yet other, stars; and far beyond them still, fleecy, fog-like nebulae: it increases the optic stimulus, and the dim light is resolved to glittering “star dust,” the star dust to stars; it adds yet other power, and lo! the fleecy² nebulae expand themselves

to firmaments—firmaments glorious with suns and their surrounding worlds; here scintillating in their own proper silver splendor; here in colors of orange, gold, and pale blue sapphire; and here, glowing with ruby and emerald—blazing in all the gorgeousness of regal diadem³—firmaments, compared with which its own, that which first met its uneducated gaze, was but as a point, a unit.

But does the Spirit here stop, and fold its wings? No, 'tis but in its noviciate. With increasing aid which its intelligence reasons forth, and which God continuously extends in exact accordance with its patient effort, it speeds still onward; plunges yet deeper into the great awful⁴ voids of space, and sweeps in exultation o'er vast congeries, islands, continents of worlds—millions, countless myriads of worlds; which, like huge starry billows,⁵ crowd the limitless ærial ocean; and still unsated, still unsatisfied, rushes on, as the blazing glories continuously unfold themselves to its enchanted gaze! This is but the beginning of education in the Deity—but the first lisping of the infant Spirit in its study of the Infinite!

Nor does it confine itself alone to its ærial study, nor to unassisted vision, in the examination of Nature's great volume open spread before it, but with microscopic aid dives into the equal wonders of the unseen beneath its feet; hovers o'er, and studies with eagerness the movements of the insect nation crowded in the bottom of the lily—each member of the busy

throng 'instinct with life, defined in individuality, each with its loves, and hates, and proper stimulus to action—watches with like curiosity the infusoria millions, sporting and fighting in the single liquid drop; invisible nothings to its naked eyesight, through magnifying power springing into entity and being;—discovers the gaudy unsuspected plumage on the insect's wing—detects the crystal's angles—with its prism, even dissects, and delightedly holds suspended, quivering in its constituent colors, light itself, its own natural stimulus—scoops from the ocean of Eternity, a drop, and calls it Time—and weighs, in like exquisite balance, the minute grain and distant worlds. And yet, this little eye, this retina, this organ so indispensable,—the key to open these wondrous mysteries, is a part, and but a portion, of the much despised body.

But what were all this to the gentle Spirit whose law is love, love which tends continually back to its great Creator, who Himself is love, if, locked up in loneliness, it could not through the sense of hearing, receive the tones of tenderness, gentleness, devotion; the interchange of thought with other intelligences—hear the mother's deep accents of affection, the prattle of the child; the gentle voice of Charity; the glorious harmonies which float it away as if by magic, until in ecstasy, it is merged and almost lost, in the unseen Infinite; or the louder, and terrific crash, which frightens it, cowering, into more immediate apprehen-

sion of the Deity? Doubtless the body is the servant of the Soul; but the connection of a minister of such necessity, provided by the Infinite, precludes the idea of accident; and we may well be startled, when we reflect to what account we shall be held for its abuse and injury; injury inevitable, when, in the least degree we o'erstep the bounds of rigid temperance; injury which paralyzes that harmony of action, which is its appointed function.

1 Planets.

2 A Nebula in the constellation "Aquarius" is estimated to be three thousand six hundred millions of miles in extent. One in "Lyra," to be distant from the earth forty-seven thousand billions of miles; another, in the constellation "Triangulum," seventeen thousand billions of miles. The nearest (!) star to our system is Alpha, in "Centaurus," which is computed to be twenty billions of miles distant. Our own solar system, although it is five thousand seven hundred millions of miles in diameter, is a mere point in the Universe. (Bouvier's Astronomy.)

3 This magnificent scene presents itself near "Kappa," in the constellation "Crucis." See Bouv. Ast., p. 250-284. For others, see Nichols' Stellar Universe, p. 172.

4 While it is hopeless for us to form even a faint idea of these awful distances, yet we may make a feeble effort at approximation towards their reality, by considering that a railroad car traveling night and day, at the rate of twenty miles an hour, would require three hundred millions of years to reach the star "Sirius;" (Bouvier's Ast.)—that with the electric fluid flashing through space, at a velocity of twenty thousand miles a second, it would alike require, were such transmission possible, ninety years to convey a telegraphic message to star 61, "Cygni;" and thirty years to Alpha, "Centauri," the nearest fixed star to the earth. (Bouvier's Ast.)

5 See Nichol's Stellar Universe, pp. 72, 73.

FREEDOM OF THE WILL.

(“CAN THE INFINITELY PERFECT BEING HAVE GIVEN MAN FREEDOM OF WILL, WHICH IS, THE LIBERTY TO OVERTHROW ORDER?”)

If we accord to the examination of this subject the same moderation and sobriety, that we do to other important questions in human life, we shall have but little difficulty in arriving at a conclusion.

The question is, not whether God could not have created man without giving him liberty; constraining him thereby always to will only that which is good, in the same manner as it is supposed in Christianity, that the blessed in Heaven are, without ceasing, impelled to love God. Who can doubt that God was the absolute master to create man from the beginning, in that state, and to have fixed him there?

I confess, that it cannot be demonstrated by the nature of our souls, nor by the rules of Supreme order, that God has not placed all the human race in this state of happy and holy necessity; and that it must be allowed that it is only the will entirely unconstrained and supreme of God, that has created man free; that is to say, exempt from compulsion, without

fixing him in the necessity to will always that which is good.

What is conclusive, however, in the matter, is the internal conviction which we entertain, without ceasing, of our freedom of will. Our reason consists alone in our clear ideas: we have but to consult them attentively, to conclude whether a proposition be false or true. It does not depend upon us to believe that the yes is the no; that a circle is a triangle; that a valley is a mountain; that night is day. From whence comes it that it is absolutely impossible for us to confound these things? It is, that reason compels us to consult our ideas; and that the idea of a circle is absolutely different from that of a triangle; the idea of a valley excludes that of a mountain; and that of day is opposed to the idea we have of night. Argue as much as we please, we can entertain no serious doubt as to our clear ideas. We do not judge of them; but it is by them that we judge, and they are the immutable rule of all our decisions. We do not deceive ourselves, save in not consulting them with sufficient exactness. If we affirm nothing which they do not present, and deny nothing which they do not exclude with clearness, we shall never fall into error; our judgment will be suspended, when the idea we consult appears not sufficiently clear, and will yield only to unquestionable distinctness. In one word, the exercise of our reason reduces itself to the consultation of our ideas. Those who reject, speculatively, this

rule, do not understand themselves, and from necessity, follow without ceasing in practice, what they reject in speculation.

The fundamental principle of all reason being thus given, I sustain that our free will is one of those truths, of which every sane man has an idea so clear, that the evidence of it is invincible. We can, indeed, dispute against this truth with our lips, and through passion, in the schools, as the Pyrrhoniens disputed ridiculously, as to the verity of their proper existence, avowing doubt of everything, without exception; but it may be said of those who contest the freedom of the will, as was said of the Pyrrhoniens, "It is a sect, not of philosophers, but of liars." They gloried in doubt though doubt was not in their power.

Every rational man, who consults and listens to himself, bears within himself an invincible decision in favor of his liberty. This idea represents to us that we are not culpable, save when we do that which we could have avoided; that is to say, have done such acts from choice, without being determined thereto by a cause superior to our will. This is a truth, says St. Augustin, for the interpretation of which we have no need to dive into the reasonings of books. It is what all nature proclaims; it is imprinted in our hearts; it is what all understand, from the children in their schools to the throne of the wise Solomon; what the shepherds sing on the mountains; the bishops teach in the holy places; and what the human race maintains

throughout the Universe. We can no more doubt, seriously and sincerely, our mental liberty, than we can doubt the existence of the bodies which surround us.

In dispute, our imaginations become heated; we deceive ourselves; we make ourselves believe that we doubt, and confuse, through vain sophisms, the most palpable truths; but in practice, we admit liberty in the same manner, that we recognize that we have arms, and legs, and bodies, and are surrounded by other bodies against which we must not impinge.

Reason as much as we please upon our ideas, we must follow them without fear of deceiving ourselves, or become absolutely Pyrrhonien. Universal doubt is unsustainable. Should our clear ideas even deceive us, it is useless to debate, to ascertain whether we follow, or do not follow, them; their evidence is invincible; it masters our judgment; and if they deceive us, we are under the inevitable necessity of being deceived. In that case, we do not deceive ourselves. It is a power superior to ourselves, which deceives us, and devotes us to error. What can we do, if we follow not our reason? If that deceives us, who is there that shall undeceive us? Have we within ourselves another reason, superior to our reason, by the aid of which we can distrust it, and rectify it? This reason reduces itself to our ideas, which we consult and compare together. Could we, by the assistance of our ideas alone, place our ideas themselves in doubt?

Have we within ourselves a second reason to contradict the first? No, doubtless. We can suspend our conclusion when our ideas are obscure, and when that obscurity holds us in suspense: but when they are as clear as that two and two make four, doubt would not be a use of reason, but insanity. If we deceive ourselves in following reason, which draws us onwards by its invincible evidence, it is the infinitely perfect Being who deceives us. We do our duty in allowing ourselves to be deceived; and we would be wrong in resisting this evidence, which subjugates us in spite of our vain resistance. I sustain, with St. Augustin, that the truth of free will, and its daily exercise, is an evidence so intimate, so unanswerable, that no man who does not dream can doubt it in practice.

Let us come to familiar examples, to render this truth sensible. We will suppose a man who affects the profound philosopher, and who denies the freedom of the will. We will enter into no dispute with him, but will put him to the proof, in the most common affairs of life, to confound himself. We will suppose that the wife of this man is unfaithful; that his son despises and disobeys him; his friend betrays him; his servant robs him. We will say to him, when he complains, "Doubtless, they are not wrong—they are not free to do otherwise." Think you that he will be satisfied with such reasoning? That he will excuse the infidelity of his wife, the insolence and ingratitude of his son, the treason of his friend, and the

robbery of his domestic? Is it not certain, that this man, who so boldly denies the freedom of the will in the schools, will recognize it as incontestible in his mansion, and that he will be none the less implacable against the offenders, than if he had sustained, all his life, the dogma of the most extreme liberty?

Again, say to him, that the community censure him for such and such an act, in the commission of which they condemn him as being in the wrong; he will answer in justification, that he was not free to avoid it, and that he doubts not, that he will stand excused in the eyes of every one when he shows that he acted, not from choice, but from necessity. We see, then, that this imaginary opponent of free will is compelled to admit in practice, what he denies in theory.

It is true, that there are certain acts which we are not free to do, and which we avoid, from necessity. In such case, we have no motive or reason to will, adequate to affect our understanding, to place us in suspense, and to cause us to enter into serious deliberation as to whether it is proper to do such acts, or to avoid them. Thus a man who is sound in body and mind, virtuous, and full of religion, is not free to throw himself out of a window, to run naked through the streets, or to kill his children. In a normal state of mind, he could have neither will to do these acts, subject of deliberation, or real indifference of will, as regards them. It could be only a melancholy madness, or a despair similar to that of divers pagans, which

could plunge him into such extremity; but as we perceive within ourselves, an utter inability to commit acts so insane while we have the use of our reason; so we feel, on the other hand, that we are unconstrained as regards all the affairs upon which we deliberate seriously. In reality, nothing would be more ridiculous than to deliberate, if we had no right to choose, and if we were always inevitably predestined to one single part.

We deliberate, nevertheless, very often; and we cannot doubt that our deliberations are well founded, when they revolve around many different points, all of which appear to have their semblance of good, and their peculiar motive to attract us. Indeed, it behooves us to believe, that all the life of man passes in the pure delusion of a dream; in deliberations which are mere child's play; or to conclude that we are free in all the ordinary cases where the human race deliberates, and thinks it decides. It is thus that we determine within ourselves, to rise or remain sitting; to speak, or be silent; to delay our repast, or to make it at once. It is in such things, that it is impossible for us to entertain a doubt as to the use of our liberty.

It must likewise be admitted, that man is not free with regard to good taken in general, nor with the sovereign good clearly known. Liberty consists in a species of counterpoise of the will, between two parts. Man cannot choose, except between objects worthy of some choice, possessing attraction in themselves, and

which present a species of equilibrium towards each other. It requires, on the part of the one or the other, true or apparent, reasons to will; these are what we call motives. And there is *good* only—true or apparent, which excites the will; for evil, in so far as it is evil, without any intermingling of good, is a nullity, deprived of all attraction.

It is necessary that the exercise of liberty should be founded on a species of counterpoise, which presents itself among the various attractions proposed. It requires that the understanding and the will should be in equipoise between these attractions, true or apparent; for it is manifest, that when we put on one side of the scale, good considered in general—that is to say, the totality of *good*, without exception—that we cannot put on the other, alone the absence of all good; and that the will can be in suspense, or deliberate seriously, between everything and nothing.

Besides, if we suppose the *sovereign* good, present and clearly known, we could not oppose to it any other good which could counterbalance it. The infinite outweighs the finite. The disproportion is infinite. The understanding, in such case, could not doubt, nor hesitate, nor suspend, for a moment, its decision. The will would be enraptured, and swept away, and deliberation, in such case, would not be deliberation, but insanity; and insanity is impossible, in a state where we suppose the supreme truth and goodness clearly present, and known. We cannot hesitate, then, as to

the Supreme good, save in not knowing it; or in knowing it, only, so superficially, imperfectly, and confusedly, as to degrade it to a point, which causes us to compare it with good infinitely inferior to it. Then the obscurity of this grand object, and the distance from which we survey it, causes a species of *equality* with the smallness of the finite object, which thus appears to us present and sensible. In this false equality, man deliberates and chooses, and exercises his liberty between good infinitely unequal. But when the *Supreme* good shows itself suddenly, with evidence—with its infinite and all-powerful attraction, it absorbs at once the love of the will; and causes all other good to disappear as the fullness of day dissipates the darkness of night.

It is easy to see, that in the course of this life the major part of the good which presents itself to us, is either so mediocre, or so obscure, that we are left in a state to compare it. It is by this comparison that we deliberate, to choose; and when we deliberate, we are conscious that we are masters to choose; because, the view of none of this good is sufficiently powerful to destroy the counterpoise, and to sweep away, invincibly, our will. It is in weighing these opposites that liberty is exercised.

Deprived of this liberty, all human life would be thrown into confusion, and there would be no longer a trace of order in society. If men are not free, in what they do of good or evil, good is no longer good,

and evil no longer evil. If a necessity, inevitable and invincible, causes us to will all that we will, we are no more responsible for it, than the spring of a machine is responsible for the movement which is mechanically impressed upon it. In such case, it would be ridiculous to find fault with the will, which acts no farther than it is compelled to act, by another power disguised from it. We must go straight to the cause, as we go to the hand that lifts a rod to strike us, without stopping at the rod, which strikes us not, save through the agency of the hand which guides it. Take away liberty, you leave on the earth neither vice, virtue, nor merit. Recompenses are ridiculous, and chastisements, unjust and odious. We do only what we ought to do, since we act from compulsion. It is not incumbent on us to avoid what is inevitable, nor to vanquish that which is invincible. All is in order; for order is, that all yields to necessity.

What is there more strange than that men should be willing thus to contradict their proper ideas; that is to say, the voice of their reason; to obstinately sustain what they are, without ceasing, constrained to deny in practice, to establish a doctrine, which overturns all order and government; which confounds vice and virtue; which authorizes the most monstrous infamy; which extinguishes shame and remorse; which degrades and disfigures, without resource, the whole human race?

Wherefore would men thus stifle the voice of their

reason? It is to throw off the yoke of religion; it is to allege a flattering helplessness in favor of vice against virtue. It is pride, alone, and the most unhallowed passions, which can drive man to such violent excess against his reason. But this excess itself should open the eyes of him who has fallen into it. Should we not distrust our corrupt hearts, and reject ourselves as judges, when we perceive that this frantic taste for evil leads us to contradict ourselves; to deny our proper liberty, the intimate conviction of which overwhelms us at each moment? "A doctrine so enormous and so mad," as Cicero says of the Epicurians, "should not be discussed in the schools, but be punished by the magistrates."

It is asked, "How is it that the infinitely perfect Being, who tends, according to his nature, to the highest perfection of his work, can have created man free; that is to say, have left him to his proper choice, between good and evil, between order, and the overturning of order? Wherefore could he have abandoned man to his proper helplessness, knowing, before hand, that the use he would make of it would be that of destroying himself, and throwing into disorder the work Divine?"

I answer—that what they would deny is incontestible. On the one side, they admit that there is but the infinitely perfect being, who has created man; on the other, all nature cries, that our wills are free. We can compel the man that denies this freedom, to affirm it

continually in all of the more serious affairs of life. This truth will escape from him in spite of himself, so full is he of it, even when he is the most desirous to contest it. It is evident that the infinitely perfect Being has created us with freedom of will. The fact is clear and decisive. We can refuse to the extreme, to prove that the infinitely perfect Being could not have put this imperfection and source of disorder into his work. But the answer is short and trenchant. The infinitely perfect Being knows much better than we what belongs to his infinite perfection; and it is evident, that man who is his work, is free; for it cannot be denied, without renouncing his proper reason. The infinitely perfect Being has shown that the liberty of man can accord with the infinite perfection of the Creator. Finite intelligence should be silent, then, and humiliate itself, when that Being decides in practice the whole question. Certainly, he has not violated order; and has made man free, since man cannot himself stifle the voice of his heart, which proclaims incessantly his liberty.

If feeble-minded man cannot comprehend how this liberty, source of all disorder, can accord with the Supreme order in the works of God; he has only to believe humbly what he cannot understand; it is his reason which holds him subjugated, without ceasing, to this innate conviction of the freedom of his will. Though even he cannot comprehend, by his reason, a truth, of which his reason permits no doubt, it is

necessary for him to regard this truth, in the same light as he is compelled to regard so many others, in the natural order of things; truths which he can neither explain, nor yet call seriously in question; as for example, that of matter, which we can neither suppose composed of atoms, nor divisible to infinity, without insurmountable difficulties. * *

We manifestly deceive ourselves, when we imagine that the infinitely perfect Being owes it to himself, for the conservation of his perfection and order, that he should give to that work the highest order and purity which he could give to it. * *

God, in creating man free, has not abandoned him to himself. He has enlightened him by reason. He is himself within him, to inspire him with good, to reproach him with the least evil, to attract him by his promises, to retain him by his menaces, to soften him by his love. He pardons us, supports us, waits for us, suffers our ingratitude and contempt; he tires not to invite us, 'till the last moment, and life entire is a continual grace.

I confess, that when man is represented as without liberty for good, from whom God demands virtues which are impossible, that this abandonment of God fills me with horror. It is contrary to his order and benevolence; but it is not contrary to the order which God has left to the choice of man, assisted by his grace to render himself happy by virtue, or miserable by sin; so that if he is deprived of the Celestial recompense, it

is because he rejects it, when it is, so to say, within his hands. In this state, man suffers no evil, save that which he elects for himself, being fully master to procure for himself the greatest blessings.

God, in creating man free, has endowed him with a wonderful trait of resemblance to the Divinity, of which he is the image. It is a marvelous power in the created, and dependent being, that this dependence prevents not his freedom, and that he can modify himself as he pleases. He makes himself good or evil at his pleasure; he turns his will towards either, as he chooses, and is, like God, master of his interior action. * * None of the attractions which present themselves here below surmount his will; none influence him invincibly; all is left to his proper determination. He is his own master; he deliberates, and decides, and has supreme empire over his own proper decision.

Is it not in keeping with the perfection of God, that he places man by this liberty in a state to merit it? What is greater in the creature than merit? Merit is a reward which man gains by his choice, and which renders him worthy of greater rewards, as he earns them. By it, man elevates, increases, perfects himself, and engages God to grant him still further blessings, which are called recompense. Is it not beautiful, and worthy of order, that God has not willed to confer happiness upon him until it has been earned? This succession of degrees, through which man ascends; is it not in keeping with the wisdom of God, and proper to

embellish his work? It is true, that man cannot deserve, without being capable of demerit; but it is not to produce demerit, that God has given us liberty. He has granted reward only in favor of well doing, and it is for merit, which is its only end, that he permits the demerit to which liberty exposes man. It is not the intention of God, and it is in spite of his succor, that man makes bad use of such excellent gift; a faculty so proper to his perfection.

God, in granting liberty to man, has displayed his bounty, his magnificence, and love; nevertheless, if man contrary to his intention, abuses this freedom, by the evasion of order, in the commission of sin, he will cause him to return to that order, in another manner; by the chastisement of his sin. Thus all wills are submitted to order; some, in loving, and persevering in this love; others in re-entering into it, through repentance of their wandering; and others by the just punishment of their final impenitence. Thus order prevails in all men; it is inviolably conserved in the innocent; repaired in converted sinners; and avenged by the eternal justice; which is itself the Sovereign order, in impenitent sinners. * *

If we regard the depth of the wisdom of God in the permission of sin, we find there nothing unjust to man, since he suffers not his wandering, save in furnishing him at the same time with all the necessary help to prevent it. If we regard this permission, in connection with God himself, it has nothing which detracts from

his order or goodness, since he only suffers that which he has neither caused, nor procured. He opposes to sin all the succor of reason and grace. There remains but his Almighty will, which opposes it not; because he will not violate the freedom which he has left to man in favor of merit; and which escapes from order, only on the side of goodness and recompense, to re-enter it at the same time, on the other through justice, and chastisement. Thus order, which has two essential parts, subsists inviolably by this alternative of mercy, or justice; to each of which it properly appertains.

Finally, we come to the conclusion of the question proposed. That free will is incontestible. That those who deny it, need no refutation, because they palpably contradict themselves; and that it is necessary to recognize our freedom without ceasing, or surrender our reason, and cease to live as men.

That which nature persuades us of so overwhelmingly, is again certified by the authority of God, speaking in the Scriptures. Why do we hesitate to believe? Whence comes it, that man, so credulous for all that flatters his pride and his passions, should search so eagerly to cavil against these truths; truths which should fill him with consolation? It is that man fears to find a God infinitely good, who desires his love, and requires from him a society which will render him supremely blessed. It is that he fears to find that his soul dies not with his body; and that after this short and unhappy life, God prepares for him, a life celestial and

without end. It is that he fears to find a God, who leaves him master of his own fate, to render himself happy by his virtue, or miserable by his vice; and who would only be served by him voluntarily.

From whence comes this fear, so unnatural, so incredulous, so contrary to our dearest interests? It is, that self love is an insane love, an extravagant love, a lost love, traitor to itself. We fear much more to restrain our passions and our vanity, during the short number of our days counted to us here below, than to lose the infinite good, to renounce life eternal, and to precipitate ourselves into eternal despair. What should be expected from the reasoning of minds so diseased, and so distrustful of all cure? Would we listen with seriousness to men, who should in any other matter, entertain prejudices so incurable against their welfare? There is but one remedy for so many evils, which is, that man shall enter within his own proper heart, not to possess himself of it, but to let it be possessed, by God; that he should pray to him, listen to him, distrust himself, confide in him, acknowledge his pride, call for aid in his helplessness to repress his passions, recognizing that self-love is the wound of his heart, and that he can find neither health, nor peace, save in the love of God.



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